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Could 'Star Wars' Foment a New Russian Revolution?

By Jerry F. Hough

IN THE WEEKS leading up to tomorrow's meeting in Geneva between Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, we've heard a great deal about the competing factions in the administration in Washington. But what about the factions in Moscow? Might they be relevant to these arms control negotiations?

Many experts argue that it is all but impossible to intelligently decipher the internal politics of the Kremlin. But we really can make a plausible assessment of the political debate in Moscow and its importance for the United States.

Two basic problems have bedeviled the analysis of Soviet politics in recent years. First, we have failed to understand the driving forces and foreign policy imperatives of economic reform — the central subject of debate on the Soviet political agenda. Second, we have erred by characterizing the Soviet Union foreign policy debate as "detente vs. anti-detente." Instead there are at least three basically pro-detente positions in Moscow; by failing to distinguish between them, analysts have confused the alignments on Soviet-American relations.

Today's Soviet Union is divided between more conservative leaders, usually of the older generation, who are afraid of change and — in many cases — eager to make peace with the United States to avoid internal reforms; and others, mostly younger men, who are themselves divided on many foreign policy issues, but united in their desire to remake the Soviet economic system.

Ironically, current American policy, which obviously encourages Moscow's anti-American hardliners, also boosts the boldest reformers — men whose political success could pose the gravest challenges to our interests. Perhaps the biggest single stimulus to internal economic reform is President Reagan's "Star Wars" missile defense program, which has confronted the Soviet leadership with a most painful reminder of its own failures to match Western technological might. If the elderly leaders now in power cannot find a political solution to the Star Wars challenge, the younger generation seems destined to reject their policies for bold and adventurous new experiments intended to make the Soviet Union more innovative, and more competitive.

Understanding of the Soviet Union and its foreign policy must begin with one basic fact: the Soviet Union and Japan began to industrialize at the same time, both suffered grievously in World War II, but today, Japan can compete effectively — too effectively — with the United States in the export of the highest-technology products, while the Soviet Union cannot even produce simple machinery that can be sold in Eastern Europe and the Third World. There is not the slightest evidence that the present economic system will ever be capable of solving this problem. The traditional Soviet pretense that their system offered a model that other countries would want to copy has, in the last 10 years, turned to ashes.

Communist revolutions now occur only in the most backward countries, and the Soviet system is not even taken seriously in the politics of industrializing Third World countries like Taiwan, Indonesia, India, Egypt, Argentina and Mexico. It is the Japanese model that is influential, and the Soviet Union looks as if it will fall behind not only Europe and Japan, but also South Korea, Singapore and maybe, God forbid, China.

In an interview published in the military newspaper Red Star last May 9, Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, then chief of the Soviet general staff, went a step further. He hinted strongly that the Soviet economy is not capable of maintaining Soviet military equality with the West. Both in that interview and in an article published in November (two months after his unexpected removal from his high post), Ogarkov essentially said that nuclear weapons are unusable. The number of nuclear weapons is so great, he said, that "you do not have to be a military man or a scholar to understand that a further buildup of them is becoming senseless." The fact that all these points were repeated either verbatim or in stronger language in the November article was a signal that he was not removed for saying them — that the leadership essentially agrees.

In the May 9 interview, Ogarkov implied that conventional weapons or technological breakthroughs would be decisive. He painted the gloomiest picture of "the rapid changes in the development of conventional means of battle . . . [which] sharply raise the fighting capacity of conventional weapons, bringing

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them to the level of weapons of mass destruction in their effectiveness" and "the rapid development of science of technology [which] create the real preconditions for the appearance in the near future of still more destructive kinds of weapons based on new physical principles." He pointedly cited a statement by Friedrich Engels about the dependence of the military upon the economy. These statements were *not* reprinted in the November article, a clear sign of how Ogarkov got in trouble with Konstantin Chernenko, the current leader.

If the Soviet population senses that the traditional communist system will doom the Soviet Union to a progressively inferior world position and even threaten its military security, the stability of the Soviet system will be in jeopardy. The Russian people are not the inert mass often depicted in the West; they conducted two of this century's most drastic revolutions in 1905 and 1917. They are fully capable of another.

If the driving force of economic reform were simply the long lines in the stores and the poor selection of consumer goods and foods, reform would require difficult changes in social policy — a raising of the prices of items like meat and bread, incentives for managers to economize on labor and to fire inefficient workers, toleration of riches for the innovative. But these would not have major foreign policy implications.

But because the problem is technological backwardness, the foreign policy implications go much deeper. Leonid Brezhnev seemed to think that importing Western technology would solve Soviet difficulties, but now Soviet economists understand that the opposite solution is more appropriate. Soviet managers will never produce goods of world-level sophistication and quality unless they are forced to meet foreign competition. Soviet managers must be forced to export technology, not simply import it, and to compete with that which is imported.

The Soviet leaders now must move towards integrating the Soviet Union into the world economy in a way that China is beginning — though only beginning — to do.

But how is Soviet business going to compete if Russians don't develop a feel for Western society and tastes — and if Soviet Central Asians don't develop such a feel for the markets of the Middle East? How can this be done without permitting greater contact with Western (and Moslem) ideas? How can the Soviet Union move towards much more intimate contact with the world market without permitting greater economic integration of West Germany and East Germany, of Western Europe and Eastern Europe?

Since the answers to these questions are clear enough, how do reformers in Moscow sell a program that arouses workers' fears of higher prices and unemployment (fears that led to a Solidarity movement in Poland), the managers' fear of foreign competition and the conservative fears of the subversive impact of foreign ideas in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe? In particular, how do they do it when the United States is in a highly confrontational posture?

If the published Soviet debates of the last two years are any guide, the answer is clear. They sell their reform ideas with anti-Americanism. Like Marshal Ogarkov, they talk about the relationship of Western technology to modern weapons and suggest that military security demands reform. Like the new director of the major international relations institute IMEMO (Alexander Yakovlev), the former editor of the government newspaper Izvestia (Lev Tolkunov) and the former ambassador to Germany (Valentin Falin), they speak about a messianic, repulsive American political culture with which it was always impossible to do business, even under President Richard M. Nixon. And they sell it (not yet publicly, but in private counsels, according to my Soviet informants) with proposals for anti-American moves to woo Western Europe and Japan — not simply with outmoded "peace" campaigns, but with concrete gestures like returning to Japan the four disputed islands Moscow seized after World War II, or granting Japanese the right to build Toyota plants in Siberia or permitting real West German-East German rapprochement.

So the Soviet debates cannot be characterized as simple pro-detente and anti-detente. The major positions in the debate are much more complex than that, and even the following attempt to lay out four positions misses many differences among people within each group.

The first position is, in essence, anti-detente. It is found in the military newspaper Red Star and the conservative journal International Affairs, and treats the West as united and threatening in its drive to achieve military superiority. As in the case of Caspar Weinberger's view, this position does not usually seem associated with the advocacy of military action, but focuses on the need to increase military spending.

In essence this position tends to be anti-reform, because its proponents tend to be Xenophobic and isolationist in regard to the West. It is expressed in assertions like Gen. Dmitri Volkogonov's that the United States has an actual "desire to 'replay' the lost battles of the 20th century by nuclear war" and that military expenditures are needed more than investment and reform: "The defense of socialism, as never before, demands not only the availability of the appropriate defense potential (economic, scientific-technical, spiritual and military), but also the capability to use them immediately."

The fact that Marshal Ogarkov went beyond this position to suggest the need for reform indicates that any simple-minded conservative position is politically weak. The inherent problem with the conservative approach is that military spending cannot solve the technological problem. Unless the SS-25 now in development flies, the Soviet Union still has not been able to develop an operational, solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile 20 years after the American Minuteman (which is such a missile), and its lag in computer technology puts it at greater disadvantage with other modern weapon technologies. Moreover, drastic cuts in consumption to allow massive new military expenditures would be politically dangerous, especially if there is no accompanying reform program that holds out the prospect of a better life to ordinary citizens.

The other three positons are all pro-detente in one way or another, but they differ enormously in their policy implications.

The second position might be called the traditional detente view. Like the conservative first position, it is based on a two-bloc image of the world, but those in this camp believe that detente between the two blocs is possible. Advocates of traditional detente emphasize the centrality of the Soviet-American relationship. They insist on Soviet dominance of its bloc, but, to an extent that is not appreciated in the United States, they generally concede Europe and Japan to the U.S. Despite their verbiage, the traditional pro-detente faction generally likes the Western alliances as a means of keeping West Germany and Japan non-nuclear, and of justifying Soviet troops in East Europe.

The traditional detente position is held by politburo members and their allies who are deeply worried by economic reform and frightened by outside ideas. It is based on the hope that a relaxation of Soviet-American tensions would reduce the domestic pressure for reform. Originally it was based on the belief — now discredited — that importing technology would be a panacea. In real political terms, the traditional detente position, not the anti-detente position, has become the basic conservative stance. It is the position taken by men such as Brezhnev, Chernenko, Gromyko and Dmitri Ustinov, the defense minister who died last month.

The third position might be called activ American-oriented detente. Its propone think that the Soviet-American relation

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be central, because only these countries have the capability of destroying each other. But unlike the traditional detente advocates, they are dedicated to economic reform. Consequently, they often speak fervently of international cooperation, the integration of the world economy and the building of trust between the Soviet Union and the United States.

This is not just propaganda for the West, but is a plea for a change in Soviet attitudes and policy as well. The traditional detente people tend to be reactive, but the activists think that American hostility might be broken down by far-reaching Soviet arms control proposals, tension-reduction in the Third World and less Soviet secrecy. This position seems to be represented by a number of professional Americanologists, including scholars like Georgi Arbatov of the Institute of the USA and Canada and Fedor Burlatsky, once an aide to Yuri Andropov.

The fourth position is the anti-American, pro-Europe, pro-Japan one. In public, it is expressed by extreme anti-American postions and by strong emphasis on division within the West. For example, the director of IMEMO, Yakovlev, has written of a "relative leveling in the strength of the three centers of power: the USA, Western Europe, and Japan," and he argued that "in the historically foreseeable future the centrifugal tendency in the capitalist world will grow." He signaled his attitude towards reform by stating that Japan is in first place in many technologies, has become "a world economic state" and has surplanted the U.S. as "the symbol of youth and dynamism in the Western world."

In private, many of the proponents of anti-American detente can be contemptuous of what they see as Soviet government's half-hearted efforts to woo Europe and Japan, and they have more substantial actions in mind. This group, however, consists of proponents of economic reform who are not merely thinking geopolitically of a dissolution of the Western bloc or the altering the loyalties ("Finlandization") of West Europe, but are contemplating a greater integration of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe into Europe and Asia as a whole, with consequences for both blocs.

It seems extremely likely that Andropov was attracted to this anti-American, pro-Europe and pro-Japan detente conception. There were men with varying views in Andropov's entourage. The careers of those like Arbatov and Burltasky, adherents of the activist, pro-American detente view, did not prosper while Andropov was general secretary, but Tolkunov and Yakovlev were promoted. When, on Sept. 23, 1983, Andropov made his famous statement about the impossibility of dealing with America, he almost surely was not rejecting detente in general, but was moving towards a pro-Europe position.

Indeed, movement towards an anti-American detente remained strong after Andropov's death in February and through the early summer of 1984. Thus, May and June featured an anti-American boycott of the Olympics, apparent encouragement of visits to West Germany by East German and Bulgarian leaders, signs of impending agricultural reform, Marshal Ogarkov's remarkable interview and subtle signs of a weakness in the position of Gromyko (a lower ranking than Ustinov in order of election speeches and a subnormal celebration of his 75th birthday in July). These were all part of a consistent package.

In August and September, as Chernenko recovered his health after a bout of heart trouble, a number of these policies were rejected in an apparent return to the traditional detente policy. Gromyko came to Washington, and his speech at the United Nations evoked memories of the wartime alliance — one of the code-words of the Americanists. The East German and Bulgarian visits to West Germany were cancelled, and the central committee plenum on agriculture did nothing. Ogarkov was removed, and Gromyko's stock soared. In October, three months late, his birthday was suddenly celebrated with unprecedented fanfare, second only to Brezhnev's himself.

The near-term future is hard to predict. In sociological terms the Politburo is deeply divided. Six of the 11 voting members are over 70. They average 74 years of age, and, if the Kazakhstan party leader is excluded, they have each worked for an average of over 30 years in high posts in Moscow. The other five members average 60 years of age, and have each worked in Moscow for an average of three years; Gorbachev with six years work in Moscow is the old-timer. To think that these outsiders agree with what has been done for 30 years stretches credulity.

Gorbachev has an enormous range of responsibilities — coordination of the economy, ideological work, foreign communists, agriculture, the food industry and, by all indications, still personnel selection. He is given assignments like his trip to Britain to test him, to broaden his experience and to build him up on Soviet television; and he has been passing these tests with flying colors. If there are forces strong enough to challenge him for the succession, it is virtually inconceivable that they would not be strong enought at least to give Romanov or someone else these kinds of experiences.

Gorbachev's policy positions cannot be pinned down. He has been playing a cautious Gary Hart role, signalling in various ways a commitment to new ideas, but not being specific. He escorts the Hungarian leader around, he chairs a very unusual Supreme Soviet Foreign Affairs Commission session on expansion of trade with the Third World (which everyone knows requires manufactured goods of world quality), he speaks out for the expansion of expenditures on light industry in his election speech (but that passage was excised from Pravda).

Domestically, the logic of his situation should certainly push him to reform. In foreign policy, Gorbachev as leader would have to opt for detente. But after an initial, broad "peace" campaign, he could easily choose the pro-Japanese, pro-European (and anti-American) version to help him sell his domestic reforms to skeptical comrades on the central committee. But much depends on events and the timing of the succession.

The foreign policy alignments and options in the Soviet Union create innumerable paradoxes for U.S. policy and Soviet-American relations. American policy has had a devastating impact on the political standing of the activist, American-oriented detente position which is most dedicated to a real improvement in Soviet-American relations. When the leaders have adopted the reassuring gestures the activists propose — small reductions in Soviet troop strength in Central Europe or the renunciation of the first use of nuclear weapons, for example — the United States has acted as if they were signs of weakness and has become more confrontational. Yet, precisely the confrontational aspects of American policy have been the biggest stimulus in building support for significant economic reform that the conservative old guard has resisted.

President Reagan's Star Wars program seems to have terrified the conservative old guard. As a consequence, those like Chernenko and Gromyko surely are almost pathetically eager for an agreement that would create the impression that American technology is being controlled. But in placing space at the center of their disarmament policy — or perhaps being forced to emphasize it by their pro-reform opponents — they have ensured that the Soviet press is filled with articles about the American threat in space. These articles implicitly and repeatedly remind Soviet readers of American technological superiority, and thus of the need for reform and new leadership if no agreement is reached.

In retrospect, it is clear that American policy of the late '70s and early '80s broke the postwar mold of Soviet-American relations and set the stage for a substantial and benefical change in international relations. But because the United States seems determined to force the Soviet Union to play to Europe and Japan, any change will represent a real challenge to which the U.S. will have to react with great sophistication.

For example, how will we react if Japan is given the four disputed islands back and gets real access to the Soviet market in exchange for a more evenhanded role in superpower relations? If change of this kind occurs quickly, the Reagan administration may wistfully wish that it had let sleeping dogs lie a bit

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